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AUTHOR Farrell, Dorothy
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ABSTRACT

Six strategies for teaching handwriting skills to learning disabled elementary students are presented, along with a rationale and illustrated step-by-step teaching procedures for each. Skills addressed include the following: (1) improving eye-hand coordination through dot-to-dot alphabet letter tracing; (2) teaching basic strokes in manuscript writing; (3) teaching linking of letters in cursive writing; (4) teaching right-handed and left-handed students how to hold a pen or pencil properly by separate procedures; (5) teaching students how to stay on the baseline with correct letter size; and (6) developing fine-motor skills to strengthen the hand and finger muscles. (JW)

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Strategies for Teaching Handwriting to LD Students

Dorothy Farrell

Baruch College

17 Lexington Avenue

York, New York 10010

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STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING HANDWRITING TO LD STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents six strategies for teachers of learning disabled students to use when they are teaching handwriting. These six skills are: increasing eye-hand coordination, basic strokes in Manuscript Handwriting, linking (connecting letters and words) in Cursive Handwriting, holding the pen or pencil the correct way, staying on the base line with correct letter size and developing fine motor skills to strengthen the hand and finger muscles. For each strategy, a rationale and lesson plan are provided (with a step-by-step approach).

Many learning disabled students find learning to write very difficult. Poor handwriting leads to frustration. Handwriting skills are important to all of us but even more important to learning disabled children. It is important because the children learn to write their name and it gives them a feeling of identity. They learn communication skills of keeping a daily dairy and writing letters. From these accomplishments, they get a feeling of self-confidence which is so important to us all.

The purpose of this paper is to describe six handwriting skills that teachers of learning disabled students can utilize when delivering handwriting instruction. For each of these skills a rationale and a step-by-step procedure section have been provided.

Handwriting Skill No. 1 - To Increase Eye-Hand Coordination

. Rationale. Your Learning Disabled students may show difficulty in focusing their eyes, in trying to find their place on the page or chalkboard, and they may not be able to judge distance. Even with 20/20 vision this can be true. The teacher should watch for head turning instead of eye movements, frequent loss of place on the printed materials, frequent omissions of the small words, confusion of left and right, uphill or downhill writing (or both) even on lined paper, poor orientation of drawings on the page and stumbling and clumsiness in the playground or classroom (Velten & Sampson, 1978).

STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING HANDWRITING TO LD STUDENTS

In the classroom, your learning disabled students will need to develop good eye-hand-coordination for letters, words, and numbers. By using games and seatwork activities, the teacher can develop fine motor ability in her students. The activities themselves will help focus your students attention on better coordination. The next step is transferring these skills to writing letters, words, and numbers for academic success (Glazzard, 1982).

Step-by-Step Approach:

o Activity: Dot-to-Dot Tracing

The teacher makes a simple dot-to-dot alphabet letter on the blackboard; e.g. the manuscript letter "A". The students trace it on the blackboard and then graduate to doing the activity on paper (Exhibit I).

Note: Colored dots are used for starting and stopping positions for each stroke. Strokes that stay on the line have green dots (for the green grass), strokes that go to the sky have blue dots (for the blue clouds in the sky) and horizontal strokes that connect the lines have red dots.

The teacher can use arrows to show the students the directions of the strokes.

1. Start at the blue dot and make a slanted (diagonal) line (to the left) to the green dot.

2. Now, go back to the blue dot and make a slanted (diagonal) line (to the right) to the second green dot.

3. Find the red dot in the middle of the first slanted line you made. Let's make a straight line from one red dot to the next red dot.

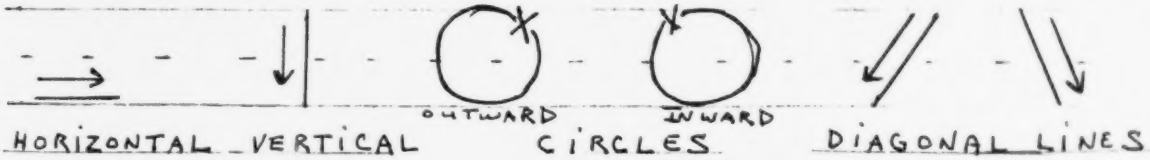
Children, we have just make the letter "A".

4. After the teacher has the child trace the letter on blackboard, she then transfers the lesson to the seatwork activities. She gives out Exhibit I as classwork. The children trace the letter "A" from dot-to-dot. Eventually the color cueing and the dots are faded out and the student is writing the letter on his own.

STRATEGIES OF TEACHING HANDWRITING TO LD STUDENTS

Handwriting Skill No. 2 - To Teach Basic Strokes in Manuscript Handwriting

. Rationale. Manuscript letters are complex visual symbols that can tax the cognitive, perceptual, and motor skills of many learning disabled students. Actually these letters are just made up of horizontal, vertical and diagonal lines, and circles (Velten & Sampson, 1978).



Once these basic strokes are mastered, they can be the foundation for the letters of the alphabet. This practice in eye-hand coordination will help your students develop integration of visual-tactual systems. By using the chalkboard exercises, the students can learn the concepts of the circle, horizontal, vertical and diagonal lines. Once your students have mastered these tasks, they will have greater accuracy in their workbooks and textbooks (Glazzard, 1982).

Step-by-Step Approach:

Visual Aids: Overhead Projector and Transparencies

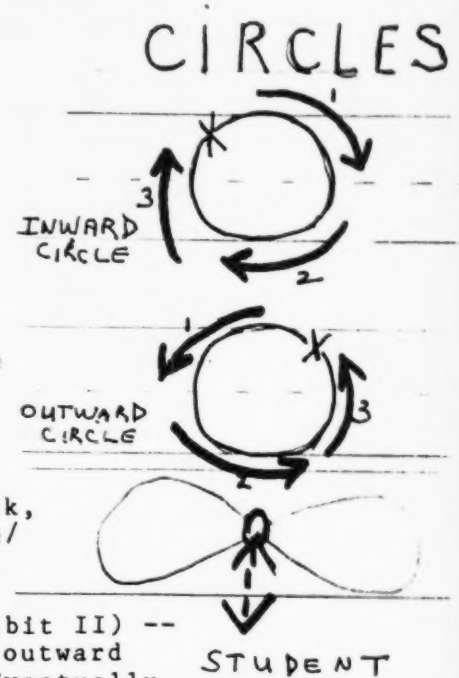
1. Write a large circle on a transparency and place it on the overhead projector onto the chalkboard. Use red colored arrows and number the arrows to provide the child with direction clues in forming the circles.

2. The child should trace the circle with his finger and then with chalk on the chalkboard using outward movements.

3. The teacher demonstrates a reverse procedure and has the student trace the circle using inward movements.

4. Make a racetrack on the transparency. Have your student stand in the center of the track, so that he or she crosses the midpoint as he/she traces (Glazzard, 1982).

5. Provide a seatwork activity dot to dot (Exhibit II) -- have the child draw circles with inward and outward movements (use arrows to show direction). Eventually the dots fade out and the child will draw the circles on his/her own. (Exhibit II).

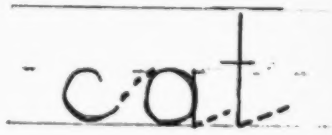


Handwriting Skill No. 3 - To Teach Linking in Cursive Handwriting (when two letters join in Cursive Handwriting)

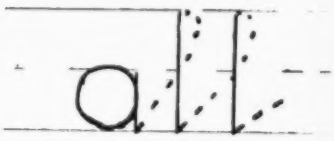
. Rationale. By tracing letters, students get kinesthetic practice that strengthens motor skills and reinforces a left to right sequence. The following method allows the teacher to introduce beginning handwriting exercises on the chalkboard. The teacher puts a writing exercise on a clear transparency and projects it onto the chalkboard using an overhead projector. The student then traces the visual pattern. These exercises form a sequential visual image for the student to copy. When the students begin to trace, the teacher must show them where to start and stop to prevent them from practicing erroneous responses. It may be necessary to repeat the name of each letter for beginning cursive writers as it is practices (Glazzard, 1982).

Materials: Chalkboard and chalk
Overhead Projector
Clear Transparencies
Marking pens for overhead projector

Step 1. The words "cat" and "all" are printed in Manuscript Handwriting on a transparency by the teacher and then this is projected onto to the chalkboard.



Step 2. The words are connected with a dotted line in colored pencil.



Step 3. The student traces over the manuscript letters and the connecting dotted line to form the cursive handwriting. (Mercer & Mercer, 1985). Seatwork activity -- Exhibit III.

Handwriting Skill No. 4 - To Teach Learning Disabled Students the Proper Way to Hold a Pen or Pencil

. Rationale. This handwriting skill is very difficult to teach because some students may have poor muscle control (there are special handwriting instruments for these students). Yet other others may just forget the correct pencil position (Malone, Jr. & Wasylk, 1981).

Step-by-Step Approach:

Visual Aids: Overhead Projector and Transparencies -- The teacher prepares the transparency or has a commercial transparency of a student sitting

with the correct posture (Exhibit III). The teacher reviews the correct way to hold a pencil while the students look at the picture on the chalkboard.

Right-Handed Students:

1. Student holds the pencil with the first two fingers and the thumb.
2. The point of the pencil touches the paper and the eraser point towards the right shoulder.
3. The first finger is on top of the pencil.
4. Student bends right thumb.
5. The last two fingers touch the paper.
6. The tip of the pencil touches the paper.
7. The right-handed student is ready to write (Malone, Jr. & Wayslk, 1981).

Left-Handed Students:

1. Student holds the pencil with the first two fingers and the thumb.
2. The point of the pencil touches the paper and the eraser point towards the left shoulder.
3. The first finger is on top of the pencil.
4. Student bends left thumb.
5. The last two fingers touch the paper.
6. The tip of the pencil touches the paper.
7. The left-handed student is ready to write.

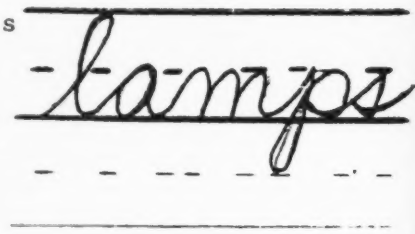
Handwriting Skill #5 - Staying on the Base Line with Correct Letter Size

. Rationale. When teaching Cursive Handwriting, the teacher discovers that some learning disabled children have difficulty with staying on the base line and with the correct

letter size. When the students' letters are not sitting on the base line, the probable cause could be improper letter formation, or poor understanding of the base line concept, or improper hand-pencil and paper-desk positions. Sometimes the students' letters are too large or too small because the student has a poor understanding of the writing lines. And sometimes the students' letters are not uniform because of adjusting the writing hand after each letter -- or there may be an overemphasis on the finger movement (Mercer & Mercer, 1985).

Step-by-Step Approach:

Visual Aids: Overhead Projector and Transparencies



1. The teacher writes the word "lamps" on a transparency and places it on the overhead projector onto the chalkboard (Glazzard, 1982).

2. You will note that the top line is colored in blue, the middle line is colored in pink, and the bottom line (or base line) is colored in green. This helps the student keep the correct letter size and to stay on the bottom line (base line).

3. The teacher has the student trace the letters of the word first with his finger and then with the chalk on the chalkboard.

4. Then this lesson is transferred to a seatwork activity. The teacher gives a handout (Exhibit IV) for the child to fill in.

5. While the children are writing the word "lamps" in cursive handwriting, the teacher observes the student's hand-pencil and paper-desk (positions of the paper on the desk) to ensure that it is correct and to assure good handwriting performance. If the children are doing their handwriting task incorrectly, the teacher is right at hand to put them "on track".

Handwriting Skill No. 6 - Developing Fine Motor Skills to Strengthen the Hand and Finger Muscles

. Rationale. Preschool and Kindergarten learning disabled children need to develop fine motor skills in their forefinger and thumb so they will be able to zipper a jacket, button a blouse or shirt, and hold a pencil in their hand (Glazzard, 1982).

STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING HANDWRITING TO LD STUDENTS

Step-by-Step Approach:

Materials: Clothespins (colored--use an Easter Coloring Kit).
Colored Tape -- suggested colors: (blue, green, red, yellow, orange, and purple).
A small white bowl

1. The teacher puts colored tape 1" wide at intervals on the edge of the bowl. (A different colored tape at each interval).

2. The teacher makes colored clothespins (one clothespin in each of the above colors). Make sure the colored clothespins are a good match your colored tape.

3. The tacher shows the student how to pick up a clothespin with the foreginger or thumb.

4. The teacher shows the child how to push the ends of the clothespins together and place them on a taped section of the bowl, i.e., to match a blue clothespin with the blue tape on the bowl.

Note: Make sure the colored clothespins coordinate (match) your colored tape. You can dye the clothespins with "RIT" dye or use and "Easter Coloring Kit". Make sure you give the clothespins enough time to dry before using them in your class.

Besides teaching developing fine motor skills, you are also teaching the children to match colors.

CONCLUSION:

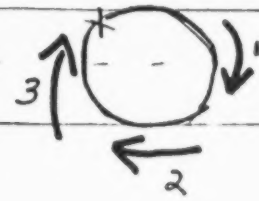
These handwriting skills contain cognitive, perceptual, and motor skills necessary for learning disabled students to achieve academic success in today's schools. These skills can be developed and trained by teachers using the proper teaching strategies that are in my Lesson Plans. It was the intent of the writer that these skills would be helpful to make our learning disabled students independent.

STRATEGIES FOR TEACHING HANDWRITING TO LD STUDENTS

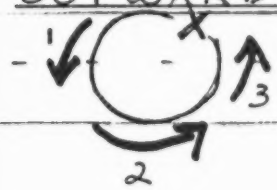
EXHIBIT I

CIRCLES

INWARD CIRCLE



OUTWARD CIRCLE



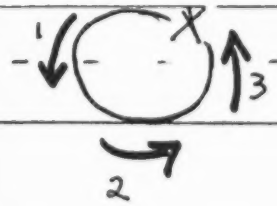


EXHIBIT II

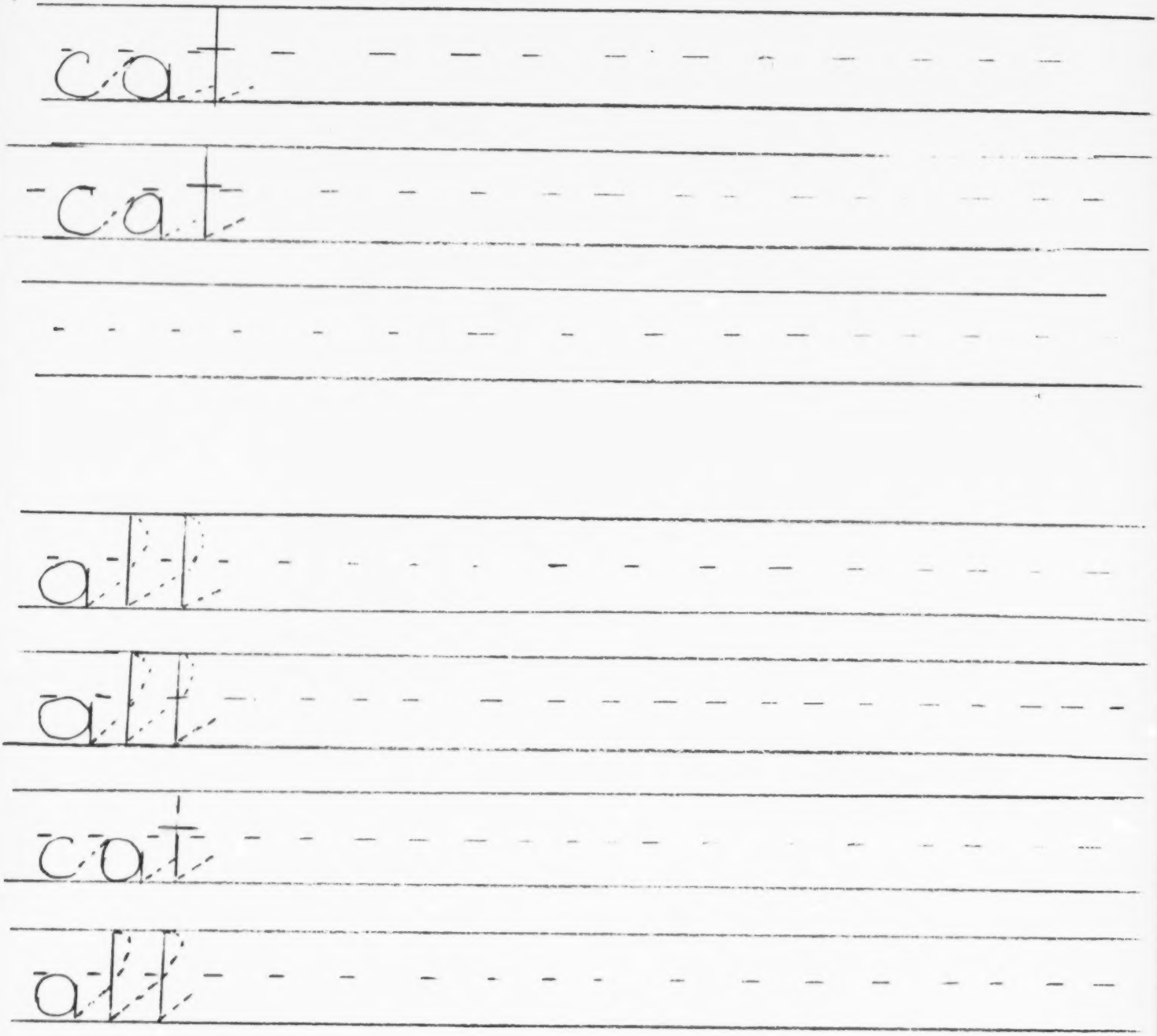


EXHIBIT III

lamps

lamps

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